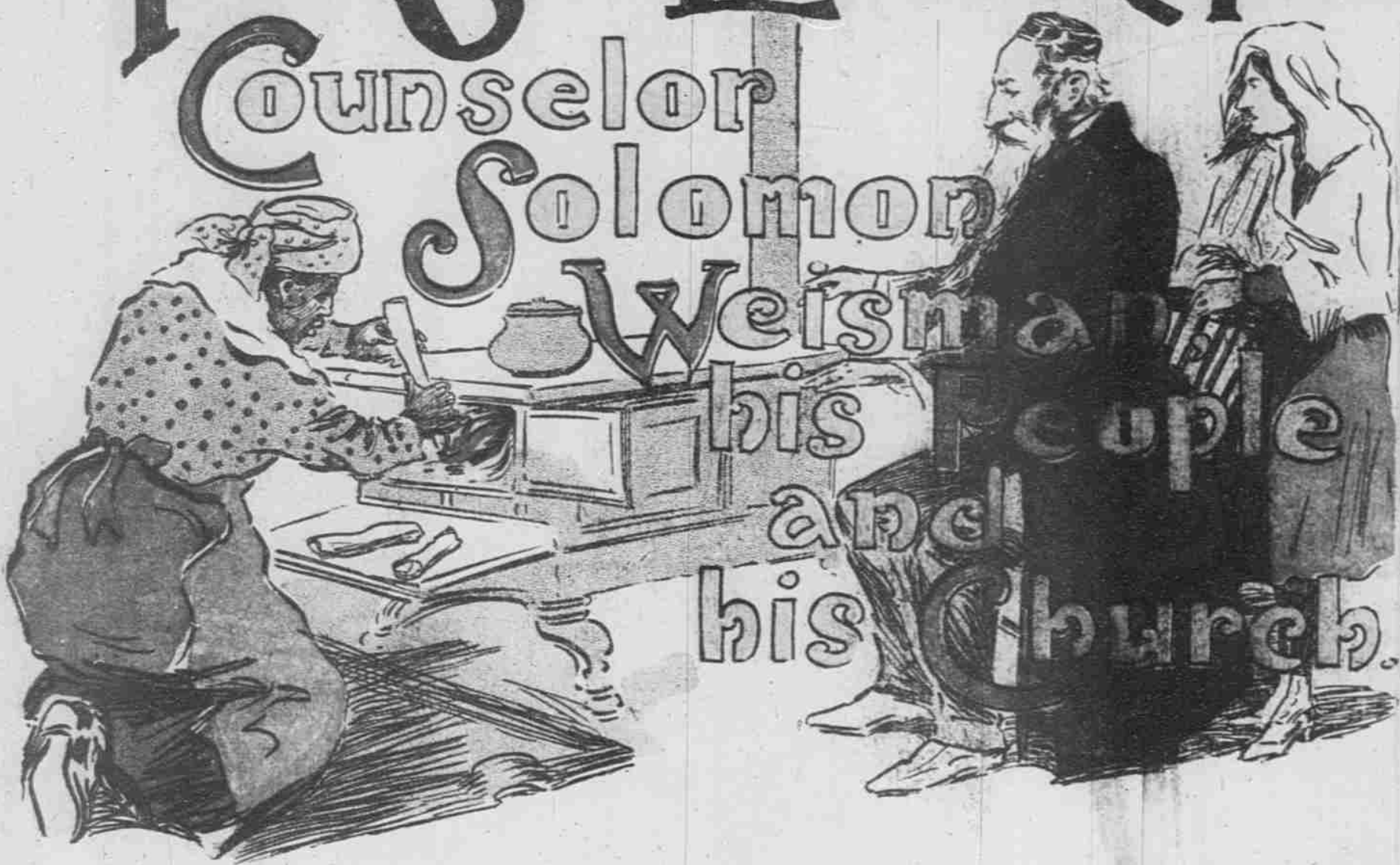


# The St. Louis Republic Magazine

## Counselor Solomon Weisman and his people and his church.



WRITTEN FOR THE SUNDAY REPUBLIC.

Dreaming of the past, dwelling in memories of the Old Testament, and wrapped in the teachings of a religion whose poetry had its origin in the heartaches and the bowing down of a persecuted people, nearly 20,000 orthodox Hebrews of the St. Louis Ghetto are to-day bringing to a close the quaint rites of their New Year holidays.

Israel Zangwill, in his Ghetto stories, has penned some marvelously impressive pictures of the inner life of the great orthodox colony of London—portrayals that are representative of the Hebrew quarters of all the large cities of the world, including St. Louis. With the purpose of meeting these people in their homes and at a time when they were practicing their orthodox, in its most picturesque form, I took a trip through the Russian Jewish district of St. Louis, which extends from the Levee to Fourteenth street and from Lucas to Cass avenues. After that I concluded that "The Children of the Ghetto" were not of the novelist's brain, but that they live and suffer and dream to-day as they did in the olden times. The Jewish district of St. Louis is a strange place—a bit of the Old World transplanted—with its tumble-down tenements, its unintelligible shop signs, its sounds of fish horns and its foreign jargons. The population is fed by refugees from Russia, Poland, Roumania and Hungary. The social life is like a magic circle, keeping its own grief and misery within, to be soled by its own poetry and religion.

TOILED IN SWEATSHOPS.

Through the doors of diminutive shops I saw the long-bearded old men presiding over their stocks of merchandise. In the numerous sweat shops young women were toiling and in the junk shops weary men were sorting over the rags and old iron gathered with infinite patience from the alleys of the city. Scores of children played in every block. It would be hard for the most careful mother to keep her little ones in the

path of cleanliness, for there is no such path in this locality. Everywhere is the dust and soot of many years' accumulation. All of the orthodox Hebrew churches are in this district. In them the people take greatest pride, for they are the centers of interest during the holidays. Whatever may have been their sins of commission or omission—they believe that all is forgiven during this glorious time.

The celebration of the Hebrew New Year proper began October 17 and closed October 20, and during that time all business was suspended. Strange ceremonies were performed in the synagogues by the priests, accompanied by the blowing of weird notes on the ram's horn.

Men, women and children studied the Old Testament, piously, preparing themselves for the greatest day on the Hebrew calendar, "Yom Kippur." This is the Friday following New Year's Day, when, according to the command of the prophet, they gather in the synagogues to receive forgiveness. All other ceremonies are merely memories of the Old Testament, Yom Kippur is a day of the present to be thankful for, ever recurring in keeping with the shortcomings of humanity—a benign provision for the salvation of the children of Israel.

No need to look into the home of an orthodox Hebrew to find him on that evening, for he is certain to be in the church of his choice, humbling himself in all sincerity, TWENTY-FOUR-HOUR FAST IS OBSERVED.

Before leaving home he had taken his last meal before the twenty-four-hour fast, which is most religiously observed by the orthodox Jew. From sunset of Friday to the same hour of Saturday he must not eat, drink, smoke or labor. Even though his lips be parched with fever he dare not moisten them with a drop of water.

I attended Yom Kippur with Isaac Rubinstein, a peddler from Carr street, who promised to explain the ritual as it progressed in the synagogue. Accompanying us were Mrs. Rubinstein and Hannah, a daughter of 13 years. We ascended the steps of the Tiphereth Israel, at Ninth and Wash streets, with our pew tickets in our hands. Mr. and Mrs. Rubinstein held copies of the ritual.

Mrs. Rubinstein and Hannah, robed in white, left us at the inner door and ascended to the gallery, where all the women were seated. Isaac donned a black and white robe fashioned like a shroud, and removed his shoes. He cautioned me to remain covered, as that is a mark of respect for the presence of God in the synagogue.

By 6 o'clock the place was crowded with worshippers, most of them bearded like my companion, and all devoutly reading their prayer books. The married men wore shrouds like Isaac's, to distinguish them from the bachelors. In the center of the church was the altar, brilliantly illuminated with electricity and candles.

The altar is a raised platform whereon stand the members of the choir. Men and boys distinguished by good voices had been selected to chant the ritual, and they appeared in black silk skull caps. The Reverend Samuel Rosenberg wore a white silk cap and a gown of the same material, which contrasted strikingly with his black hair and beard. He assumed the attitude of an attorney pleading with the Almighty for mercy for the members of his flock, who represented the defendants before the bar of justice. All were praying that their sins be forgiven.

TEXT OF THE ORTHODOX HEBREW RITUAL.

In the Orthodox Hebrew ritual it is written, as Isaac explained, as follows:

On the day of atonement it is sealed and determined how many shall pass by and how many shall be born, who shall live and who shall die, who shall finish his allotted time and who shall be in peril by fire, who by water, who by the sword and who by wild beasts; who by hunger or who by thirst; who shall be at rest and who shall be wandering; who shall remain tranquil and who shall be disturbed; who shall reap enjoyment and who be painfully afflicted; who shall grow rich and who become poor; who shall be cast down and who exalted.

As the priest raised his voice and pleaded for his people, the worshippers prayed aloud from their books, standing or sitting in humble postures. Then, as the tenor voice became more impassioned, their bodies began to sway to and fro, and many wept. Cries of anguish arose all over the synagogue—a shrill refrain coming from the women in the galleries.

Until the ritual was finished in the final shriek of supplication, about half past 8,

the worshippers continued to pray. After the crowd departed some of the old men remained for an all-night communion. The dawn found most of them in attitudes in the pews and aisles, fallen from sheer exhaustion, or asleep with grizzled heads bowed upon their books.

Isaac Rubinstein did not stay long after the multitude left, but he went home sobbing as though his heart would break. It is the simplicity of these people and their sincerity that make this Yom Kippur service so remarkable.

There are a number of beautiful observances at this season. If you ask the celebrant their origin he will tell you they are "memories of the past." Four days after Yom Kippur the Feast of Tabernacles begins. Every family erects in a convenient spot on the premises a booth or tent called Succoth. It is usually about 7 feet square, constructed of boards or canvas, and roofed with branches of evergreen or spruce loosely over the top in such a manner that the sky is plainly visible. Within there is a table. The walls are decorated with branches of palm and willow and with the joint

RAHIB WHO RESIDES IN COUNT LEO TOLSTOI.

From the lips of aged Solomon Weisman, commonly called "Zabbi" by his people, I learned many things of interest about the religion. The rabbi resembles Count Tolstoy's picture.

"Ah, Tolstoy is a man," he said, looking over his gold-rimmed spectacles at me with a kindly light in his bright eyes. "He loves all men, whether they be Jews or Gentiles, pagans or atheists."

"You want to know about my religion in its most orthodox sense? My friend, I cannot tell you how beautiful it is to me, nor can I express to you what a comfort it is to the true believer. This holiday season is like a string of pearls, each day a jewel representing some memory of the Testament."

"As has been done by my people since the days of Moses, so do we to-day in St. Louis. As Christmas and Thanksgiving Day are dear to the hearts of Christians, so are Yom Kippur and Succoth to us. There is a glamour about them such as only the dear associations of childhood can give. They are the bright spots in our lives."

"There is Succoth, when we make our tents in the open in memory of the time when Moses led the Hebrews out of Egypt. Then our people were without houses, and erected their tents wherever twilight fell upon them. They made them bowers of green, with the stars shining through upon them as they slept. They were homeless, but free, and under the guidance of the great prophet. Is not that a happy memory to keep fresh? So we pitch our tents where the stars can shine in on us, and remind us of that time in Egypt 3,500 years ago."

COUNSELOR SOLOMON WEISMAN IS THE ADVISER OF THOUSANDS OF ORTHODOX HEBREWS.

tenants in the open in memory of the time when Moses led the Hebrews out of Egypt. Then our people were without houses, and erected their tents wherever twilight fell upon them. They made them bowers of green, with the stars shining through upon them as they slept. They were homeless, but free, and under the guidance of the great prophet. Is not that a happy memory to keep fresh? So we pitch our tents where the stars can shine in on us, and remind us of that time in Egypt 3,500 years ago."

"If we have been dutiful to God our sins have been forgiven on Yom Kippur, and that is another reason to enjoy the tabernacle feast with care-free hearts."

"At the end of Succoth, after eight days we cease to dream. The children catch up lighted candles, and go in long processions to the synagogues in the evening, singing happily, and after giving thanks for the beginning of a new year, we are at liberty to feast and enjoy all the good things of life at our command."

"We in America are glad that we have so many privileges that are denied to our less fortunate brethren in Russia and Roumania, and I hope the coming year will see the deliverance of my people from persecution in those countries. This winter will be a hard one in St. Louis on account of the coal strike, for our poor suffer enough from the lack of fuel even when there is plenty of it on the market."

FIRE BUILDERS HAVE THEIR REGULAR PATRONS.

No orthodox Jew will smoke, touch a match or a tinder box, build a fire or even order one to be built on Saturday, the Jewish Sabbath. In winter, when a fire is needed, a Christian is called in on Friday and requested to come the next day to perform this duty. In this city are a number of old men who are too infirm to go out into the streets and beg or peddle who eke out a poor existence by building fires for the Jews. For this service the usual recompense is 5 cents.

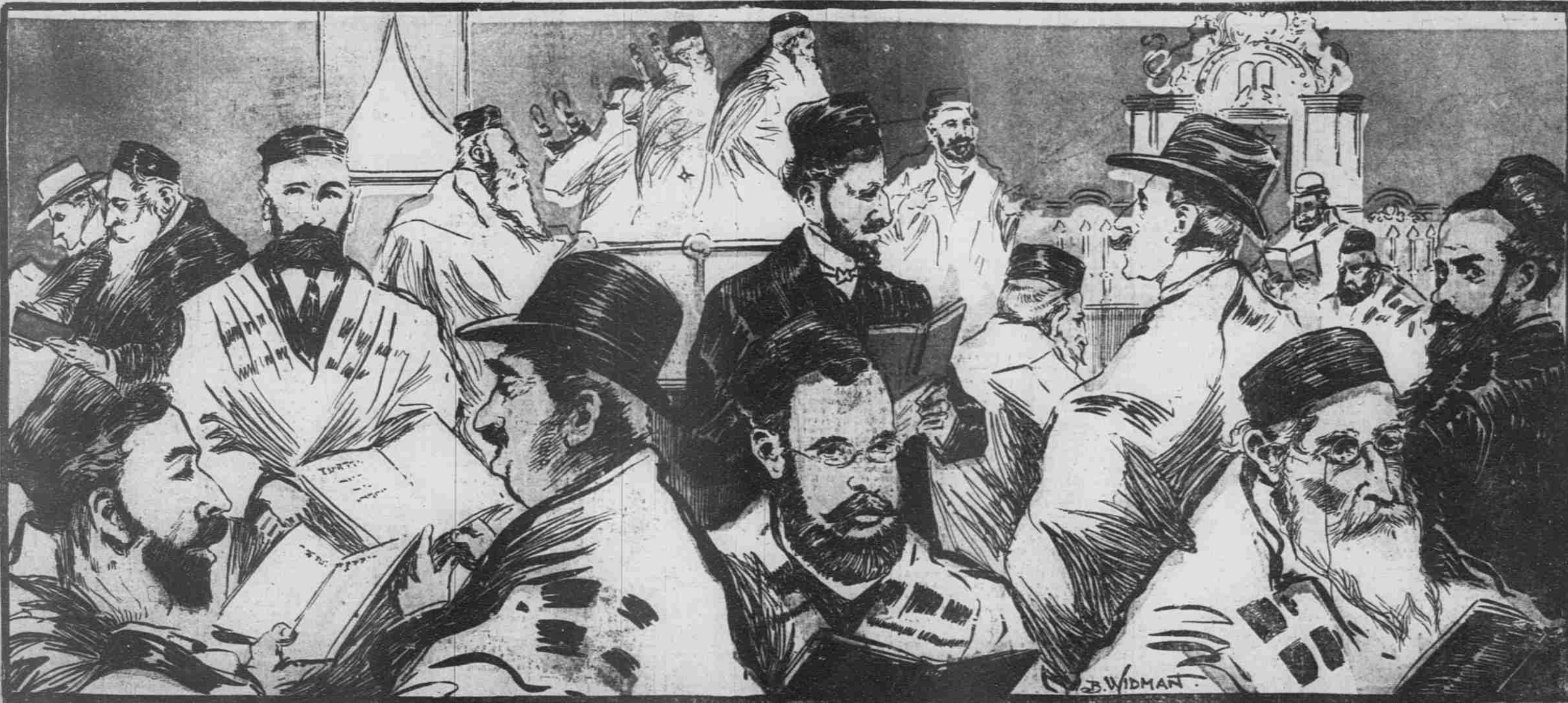
Some of the queer fire priests have regular routes, earning \$1 or \$4 a week. They become so accustomed to it that they walk into the homes of their patrons and light the fires without a word being spoken, contently receiving the stipend and departing like a shadow.

special reason for observing this, except that Moses commanded it. It is intended only for the people of Israel, and they do not believe that the Christian is trespassing by touching fire, because Moses had not commanded him to refrain.

Quaintest among all this quaint company of silent firemakers is an aged negress, known only as "Aunt George Ann" who has no particular abode, but makes her rounds in frosty weather on Carr and Wash streets between Sixth and Twelfth, always accompanied by a decrepit dog she calls "Bo." To the tots of the Ghetto she is a black fairy, who, presumably, steps out of the fairy-books only long enough to apply the flickering flame to the family hearth. I found her on Wash street smoking a cob pipe. She looked at me curiously as I approached.

"Gwan 'way fum me, mah," she said, bantering, while her dark countenance broke into a wrinkled grin. "Ah's bin a-bullfinch them flabs for the Hebrew people thirty years now, an' nobody nevah said nothin' 'bout it yit, cause dey alse nothin' 'ticular to say."

HARRY T. QUINN.



OBSERVING "YOM KIPPUR" AT THE TIPHERETH ISRAEL SYNAGOGUE